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ABSTRACT

Career development theories provide useful ideas for understanding career indecision, but neglect of a measurement of career indecisiveness has caused confusion. To examine the relationship between trait indecisiveness, vocational uncertainty, and interpersonal characteristics, 325 freshmen students were tested with a Trait Indecisiveness Scale and the Leary Interpersonal Checklist. The relationship between indecisiveness and vocational surety was examined by a chi-square test, while the relationship between indecisiveness and interpersonal characteristics was examined by a two-group discriminant analysis based on high versus low indecisive subjects. Self-reported vocational surety was significantly related to indecisiveness, lending support to the validity of the Trait Indecisiveness Scale. Results of the discriminant function showed that the primary interpersonal variables which contributed to the differences between high and low indecisiveness groups were submissiveness, lack of general dominance, self-criticalness, passivity, and cooperativeness (related to the need for acceptance). The validity of the indecisiveness construct as an important component of vocational indecision was supported. Clients suffering career indecision might also have high trait indecisiveness and be experiencing interpersonal discomfort. (Author/JAC)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF TRAIT INDECISIVENESS TO VOCATIONAL UNCERTAINTY, CAREER INDECISION, AND INTERPERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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ABSTRACT

A sample of 325 freshman students attending a summer orientation program were tested with a Trait Indecisiveness Scale and the Leary Interpersonal Checklist. The relationship between indecisiveness and vocational surety was examined by a Chi-square test; whereas the relationship between indecisiveness and interpersonal characteristics was examined by a two-group discriminant analysis based on high versus low indecisive subjects.

The validity of the indecisiveness construct as an important co-component of vocational indecision was supported. In addition, the results indicate significant relationships of indecisiveness with higher levels of self-criticalness, submissiveness, passivity, and the need for acceptance, and with lower levels of interpersonal dominance. Suggestions for future studies and implications for career counseling are also discussed.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TRAIT INDECISIVENESS TO VOCATIONAL UNCERTAINTY, CAREER INDECISION, AND INTERPERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Theories of career development provide many useful ideas for understanding career indecision, but an adequate empirical basis for understanding the phenomenon and effectively intervening with clients has been elusive. Osipow, Carney and Barak (1976) suggested that an adequate understanding of the construct of career indecision might result from expanding and exploring its component parts. Hartman and Fuqua (1982) argue that career indecision is a complex, multidimensional problem and the differential diagnosis and treatment of career indecision is an important, pressing objective for career counselors and researchers in this area.

A number of authors have addressed the distinctions between having career indecision and being undecided about a career (Crites, 1974; Holland & Holland, 1977; Solomone, 1982). While this distinction is useful and moves in the direction of a more adequate understanding of career indecision, we believe that it remains a somewhat simplistic response to the need for a complete analysis of the different components of this construct. In particular, the neglect of a measurement of trait indecisiveness has caused extensive confusion.

An approach to this problem would be to identify psychological, social, environmental, and behavioral variables that relate to vocational uncertainty, career indecision, and trait indecisiveness. In the long term a more complete understanding of these components of the construct might be extrapolated. In the shorter term more effective assessment and

intervention methods might be developed for career services. For example, several psychological variables have already been found to relate to career indecision: state and trait anxiety (Hawkins, Bradley & White, 1977; Kimes & Troth, 1974; Medonca & Seiss, 1976), external attribution (Cellini, 1978) and identity (Holland & Holland, 1977; Kelso, 1976; Rose & Elton, 1971). The relationship of career indecision to these variables alone is enough to convince us that at least for some clients career indecision is not a routine developmental task, although some professionals continue to conceptualize the construct in those terms (Grites, 1981; Titley & Titley, 1980).

The purpose of this study was to provide an examination of the relationship between trait indecisiveness, vocational uncertainty, and interpersonal characteristics, which has not yet been addressed. The rationale for this examination was twofold. First, the presence of such a relationship would provide support for the hypotheses that career indecision is a complex, multidimensional problem requiring the inclusion of a trait indecisiveness dimension. Of a more practical nature, the presence of such a relationship might very well indicate a source of assessment data prerequisite to a more complete diagnosis of the client presenting career indecision. Ultimately it may be found that effective career interventions need to more completely address the interpersonal dimensions of the client's problem.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects: The subjects of this study were 268 male and 57 female entering freshmen students attending summer orientation sessions at a technologically-oriented midwestern university. The orientation program included ten groups of 110-115 students over the course of one summer month. The groups selected for the sample were all the students involved in the first, fourth, and ninth sessions.

Instruments: The instruments employed consisted of a brief questionnaire adapted from a study of Salomone (1982) about the assessment of trait indecisiveness, which accompanies career indecision; and the Interpersonal Checklist (ICL) by Leary, Suczek, and LaForge (1957) which rates interpersonal characteristics.

The Trait Indecisiveness Scale utilizes a yes-no format on eight questions which characterize persons who are highly indecisive, i.e., have difficulty making personal decisions; and who are also vocationally undecided, i.e., lack of information about career areas and/or personal interests. The questions included on the scale were as follows:

1) I find it difficult to make a decision even after collecting information and talking to others.
2) I feel a lot of frustration and uncertainty in making personal-vocational choices.
3) I like to get specific suggestions from others, but usually do not act on this advice.
4) I often ask my parents for help when I have an emotional problem.
5) I seem not to feel good about myself much of the time.
6) Situations and other people exercise a great deal of influence over my life.

7) I would like to change some of my patterns of behavior but find it difficult to do so.

8) I often feel helpless in dealing with unpleasant situations.

The Interpersonal Checklist (ICL) is a 128 item self-rating adjective checklist devised to measure eight interpersonal characteristics(i.e., controlling, assertive, angry, self-critical, submissive, passive, cooperative, and supportive). These eight traits are considered to be present in each person to some extent; however, extreme amounts, either too little or too much, of any of the traits are considered to be undesirable. The ICL utilized sixteen descriptive phrases within each trait category which are weighted 1 through 4 depending on intensity. Endorsement and/or more intense phrases leads to a higher score on that personality characteristic. The reliability of the test is adequate (r=.78) (LaForge & Suczek, 1955).

Procedures: Both the Trait Indecisiveness Scale and the Interpersonal Checklist were administered to subjects during the first day of academic orientation. Subjects were also asked to indicate the surety of their career choice in a dichotomous yes-no format. Subsequent to testing subjects were divided by a median split into high and low indecisive groups based on their responses to the Trait Indecisiveness Scale (Median = 2.7).

RESULTS

The relationship of indecisiveness to self-reported vocational-decision surety was examined by a Chi-square test of high and low indecisiveness with high and low vocational certainty. The results for this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Self-reported vocational surety was significantly related to indecisiveness ($\chi^2(1)=5.02$, $p < .03$), which lends support to the validity of the Trait Indecisiveness Scale as an important co-component of career indecision.

Since it is likely that the test instrument did not measure indecisiveness at the interval level, the comparison of trait indecisiveness with personality characteristics was investigated through the use of a two-group discriminant analysis of high versus low indecisive subjects, as determined by the median split.

The results of the discriminant function significantly separated the two groups, ($\chi^2(9)=55.74$, $p < .01$), with 66 percent of cases correctly classified. Table 2 presents the standardized discriminant function coefficients, and the structure matrix correlations for the eleven interpersonal variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

The results in Table 2 indicate that the primary interpersonal variables which contribute to the differences between high and low indecisiveness groups are submissiveness, lack of general dominance, i.e. on the dominance-submissiveness axis, self-criticalness, passivity, and cooperativeness (which is related to the need for acceptance).

To further clarify the relationship between high versus low indecisiveness subjects, table 3 presented the means and standard deviations for both high and low indecisiveness groups on each of the 11 interpersonal characteristics.

Insert Table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

The results reported here provide some limited evidence to support the hypotheses that trait indecisiveness is related to vocational certainty and interpersonal characteristics. Further, these results support Hartman and Fuqua's (1982) contention that career indecision is a complex behavioral-psychological state that involves a component of trait indecisiveness as well as vocational uncertainty. The finding that there may be an interpersonal component which affects career indecision is also consistent with Osipow, Carney and Barak's (1976) suggestion that a more adequate understanding of career indecision may require the identification and extension of different components of the indecision construct.

These results are far from conclusive. Ultimately the relationship observed needs to be explained more fully in a cause and effect sequence, which this study does not approach. For example, would interpersonal training interventions be effective in reducing trait indecisiveness and career indecision?

Although admittedly not conclusive, the results do have some practical implications for researchers and career counselors. Our primary interpretation suggests that research should be focused on first determining the range of variables related to career indecision and subsequently on identifying patterns of those relationships that might provide a more complete understanding of the problem.

More immediately career counselors might be advised that clients suffering career indecision may also have high trait indecisiveness and may be experiencing interpersonal discomfort in the form of submissive tendencies, passivity, and an acute need for social acceptance. These

characteristics may require direct intervention, or at least suggest some general guidelines for the therapeutic relationship. It would also seem advisable to address the interpersonal dimension in the assessment of the client presenting career indecision.

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Table 1

Chi-Square Test of Trait Indecisiveness

With Vocational Decision Surety

	Decision Surety		Chi-Square	p
	Very Sure	Not Sure		
Low Indecisiveness	100 (54%)	85 (46%)	5.02	.03*
High Indecisiveness	55 (41%)	80 (59%)		

Table 2

Standardized Discriminant Correlation Coefficients

And Structure Matrix Correlations

For the Interpersonal Variables

Variable	St. Discrim. Corr. Coeff.	Structure Matrix Correlation
Controlling	-.046	-.10
Assertive	-.208	-.17
Angry	.134	.17
Self-Critical	.424	.55
Submissive	.665	.76
Passive	.027	.39
Cooperative	.526	.36
Supportive	-.462	.11
Dominant	*	-.67
Nurturant	*	.16
Balanced	-.319	-.16

* Did not meet tolerance test

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations

of the Interpersonal Variables

Variable	Low Indecisiveness		High Indecisiveness	
	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)
Controlling	11.76	6.9	11.11	7.5
Assertive	11.94	3.0	11.15	5.6
Angry	9.62	5.2	10.48	6.3
Self-Critical	5.69	4.8	8.18	5.6
Submissive	6.76	4.5	10.34	6.1
Passive	8.11	4.9	10.02	6.2
Cooperative	10.38	6.9	12.71	7.8
Supportive	10.17	7.6	10.91	7.2
Dominant	10.82	11.7	3.47	13.5
Nurturant	1.22	15.7	3.35	15.6
Balanced	19.49	11.0	17.94	11.2